



Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Wednesday, May 26, 2021

TO: Revenue Measure Oversight Committee

FROM: PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR CALUBAQUIB

SUBJECT: PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT STATUS
REPORT FROM JANUARY – JUNE 2020

STATEMENT OF ISSUES:

Status report for the Parks and Community Services Department.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive staffing and operations report from Parks and Community Services Department from January 1 – June 30, 2021.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The Parks and Community Services Department (PCS) is dedicated to *creating exceptional experiences that enhance the quality of life*. PCS is a key provider of high quality recreational and community programs, special events and facilities that provide recreational experiences, foster human development, promote health and wellness, increase cultural unity, facilitate community problem solving, protect natural resources, strengthen safety and security, strengthen community building and support economic development. The Department is comprised of a Parks Division and a Recreation Division.

The Parks Division strives to provide safe, clean and green parks and open spaces for the community to enjoy. Division teammates protect environmental resources and strengthen community image and sense of place within the City's neighborhoods by maintaining Watsonville's 26 public parks (143 acres), street median islands, City trees and landscaping and public grounds.

The Recreation Division provides recreation and leisure services throughout the community, including at seven recreation centers, and through youth development programs, youth and adult sports, aquatics, adult and senior programs, camps, classes, facility rentals and community special events.

Measure Y Update

Measure Y, which was approved by voters in March 2020, included language that allocates eight percent (8%) of the public safety sales tax measure to the Parks and Community

Services Department. During the development of the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget, this was estimated at approximately \$232,000.

Language in the Measure stated that “the public safety sales tax measure will enable the City to hire more parks and recreation staff for youth prevention programs, increase recreation services to neighborhoods, and upgrade equipment and facilities to increase and improve safe places for youth in the Watsonville Community.”

The Department’s FY 20-21 Measure Y budget includes funding to support:

- Staff and supplies for free after school and summer youth development programs, primarily at the GHWR Youth Center
- Youth case management services provided by Pájaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA)
- Staff, supplies and contract services for park and playground enhancements, maintenance and operations

Free After School and Summer Programs

Measure Y funds were budgeted to expand late night and weekend prevention programs for youth. Restrictions due to COVID-19 have severely limited the types of programs the Department has been able to operate for youth. Over the past year, PCS has concentrated efforts in offering distance learning and enrichment pods to small groups of youth. These programs have been funded by the City’s General Fund and through partnerships with the County of Santa Cruz and the Pájaro Valley Unified School District. Unfortunately, the planned, broad reaching, free prevention programs at the GHWR Youth Center have not been allowed to occur since shelter in place restrictions were first enacted. Measure Y funds allocated for this program have been and will continue to be used for park and playground enhancements this year. The PCS Team plans to reopen its youth programs in June after the school year ends and begin offering late night activities.

Youth Case Management (YESS Program)

PCS partners with PVPSA provide case management services to youth throughout the community. The YESS (Youth Enrichment Support Services) Program provides youth and families support to reach academic success and a healthy social-emotional balance. Youth received support and referral services through an assigned case manager. In addition, the program offers youth, parents/guardians and PCS teammates with educational workshops to increase the ability to be positive role models and develop healthy behaviors, positive communication and relationships. The program is based out of the Youth Center; however, youth may be referred to the program from any PCS program, PVPSA, PVUSD or any other youth serving organization.

Services have been modified due to COVID, with meetings with case managers and trainings taking place online. Enrichment activities that are usually planned to supplement these services and build positive relationships have been put on pause. These limitations have also affected the ability to reach a larger number of youth. The YESS program is currently serving 18 active youth and their families.

Despite these limitations, the program successfully provided referral services to many of the participants. Case managers work closely with their clients' school staff to collaborate with teachers and vice-principals, and with resources and organizations, such as the Food Bank to provide clients and their families with food during COVID; PAL for enrichment activities and the United for Youth collaborative, Youth Now and Community Action Board to obtain information on virtual opportunities for youth. Opportunities of engagement are shared with program youth and families. In addition, referrals have been made to other CBOs, such as Community Bridges, Families in Transition, WIC, Watsonville Law center, Housing Authorities and financial assistance programs. Linkages have been provided to clients and families to access support for food, housing, woman's services, clothes, distance learning and legal assistance in the community. Several youth in need of mental health services were assigned to a therapist.

Through participation in the program, youth have reported that they feel more connected and have established a cohesive relationship with their case manager. Many are now more open to speak about uncertainty and stress that COVID has caused families/clients.

Thus far, five program youth have completed the program successfully. These participants shared that they felt confident and excited to complete services. They have shown growth in areas of need and have moved on to their daily routines more confident and optimistic.

PCS has renewed its contract with PVPSA for the next two years and plans to resume in-person services in June.

Park and Playground Maintenance

Measure Y funds support staff, supplies and contract services for the enhancement, maintenance and operations of our community's public parks and playgrounds. Due to many years of budget recessions and limitations, the City's parks and facilities have accumulated approximately \$20 million in deferred maintenance needs. These needs range from landscape repair to equipment replacement to termite mitigation, to the replacement of playground structures. Investments in these areas are needed to mitigate further damages, address safety concerns and improve user experience.

Restrictions due to COVID-19 and the effects on work environments, schools and daily life have encouraged community members to seek more time outdoors to get some fresh air, relieve stress, exercise and find a sense of normalcy. Throughout the pandemic, parks and public land have seen some of their highest usage in modern times, and Watsonville is no different. Numerous scientific studies demonstrate that the availability of accessible, safe and quality parks and open space is crucial to personal and community well-being. This fact has been underscored by the pandemic, especially in disadvantaged communities and communities of color.

According to the Trust for Public Land, "Parks are proving to be an essential part of how we cope and recover from this crisis...As officials reimagine park policy in real time, equitable access is becoming a driving factor in decision-making...Decisions made in the next few

months will determine whether the outdoors become more accessible and equitable and further benefit the health of communities, or slide backward...The pandemic highlights that in too many communities, access to the outdoors is considered a privilege when it should be a right.” Investment in our parks and open spaces is more crucial now than ever.

The staff and supplies budget lines are used to address some of these deferred maintenance needs. In addition to general maintenance and repairs, this year funds will be used for tennis court resurfacing and various playground equipment repairs.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

- 03-Infrastructure & Environment – Measure Y funds are used to address enhancements, maintenance and operations of our community’s public parks and playgrounds.
- 05-Community Engagement & Well-Being – Measure Y funds are used to support youth engagement programs, such as the YESS program.
- 06-Public Safety – Pro-social youth engagement programs serve as prevention programs that provide young people with the skills, assets and supports needed to be resilient against negative and illegal behaviors and to become healthy, thriving adults.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact. Measure Y funds are being utilized as directed by the voters.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

None.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):

None.